



Review Article

SOLUBILITY ENHANCEMENT TECHNIQUES OF DRUG :A REVIEW

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Abstract: Solubility, the phenomenon of dissolution of solute in solvent to give a homogenous system, is one of the important parameters to achieve desired concentration of drug in systemic circulation for desired (anticipated) pharmacological response. Low aqueous solubility is the major problem encountered with formulation development of new chemical entities as well as for the generic development. More than 40% NCEs (new chemical entities) developed in pharmaceutical industry are practically insoluble in water. Solubility is a major challenge for formulation scientist. Any drug to be absorbed must be present in the form of solution at the site of absorption. Various techniques are used for the enhancement of the solubility of poorly soluble drugs which include physical and chemical modifications of drug and other methods like particle size reduction, crystal engineering, salt formation, solid dispersion, use of surfactant, complexation, and so forth. Selection of solubility improving method depends on drug property, site of absorption, and required dosage form characteristics.

Key words: Importance of Solubility, Solubility enhancement

1. Introduction

Solubility is the property of a solid, liquid, or gaseous chemical substance called *solute* to dissolve in a solid, liquid, or gaseous solvent to form a homogeneous solution of the solute in the solvent. The solubility of a substance fundamentally depends on the solvent used as well as on temperature and pressure. The extent of solubility of a substance in a specific solvent is measured as the saturation concentration where adding more solute does not increase its concentration in the solution ^[1].

The solvent is generally a liquid, which can be a pure substance or a mixture of two liquids. One may also speak of solid solution, but rarely of solution in a gas.

The extent of solubility ranges widely, from infinitely soluble (fully miscible) such as ethanol in water, to poorly soluble, such as silver chloride in water. The term *insoluble* is often applied to poorly or very poorly soluble compounds ^[2].

Solubility occurs under dynamic equilibrium, which means that solubility results from the simultaneous and opposing processes of dissolution and phase joining (e.g., precipitation of solids). Solubility equilibrium occurs when the two processes proceed at a constant rate. Under certain conditions equilibrium solubility may be exceeded to give a so-called supersaturated solution, which is metastable ^[3].

Solubility is not to be confused with the ability to dissolve or liquefy a substance, since these

processes may occur not only because of dissolution but also because of a chemical reaction. For example, zinc is insoluble in hydrochloric acid, but does dissolve in it by chemically reacting into zinc chloride and hydrogen, where zinc chloride is soluble in hydrochloric acid. Solubility does not also depend on particle size or other kinetic factors; given enough time, even large particles will eventually dissolve ^[4].

IUPAC defines solubility as the analytical composition of a saturated solution expressed as a proportion of a designated solute in a designated solvent. Solubility may be stated in units of concentration, molality, mole fraction, mole ratio, and other units ^[5].

Extensive use of solubility from different perspective has led to solubility being expressed in various manners. It is commonly expressed as a concentration, either by mass (g of solute per kg of solvent, g per dL (100 mL) of solvent), molarity, molality, mole fraction, or other similar descriptions of concentration. The maximum equilibrium amount of solute that can dissolve per amount of solvent is the solubility of that solute in that solvent under the specified conditions ^[6]. The advantage of expressing solubility in this manner is its simplicity, while the disadvantage is that it can strongly depend on the presence of other species in the solvent (e.g., the common ion effect).

Saturated solutions of ionic compounds of relatively low solubility are sometimes described by

solubility constants. It is a case of equilibrium process. It describes the balance between dissolved ions from the salt and undissolved salt. Similar to other equilibrium constants, temperature would affect the numerical value of solubility constant. The value of this constant is generally independent of the presence of other species in the solvent.

The Flory-Huggins solution theory is a theoretical model describing the solubility of polymers. The Hansen Solubility Parameters and the Hildebrand solubility parameters are empirical methods for the prediction of solubility. It is also possible to predict solubility from other physical constants such as the enthalpy of fusion.

The partition coefficient (Log P) is a measure of differential solubility of a compound in a hydrophobic solvent (octanol) and a hydrophilic solvent (water). The logarithm of these two values enables compounds to be ranked in terms of hydrophilicity (or hydrophobicity).

The Biopharmaceutics Classification System (BCS) is a guide for predicting the intestinal drug absorption provided by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. This system restricts the prediction using the parameters solubility and intestinal permeability.

Solubility is based on the highest-dose strength of an immediate release product. A drug is considered highly soluble when the highest dose strength is soluble in 250 mL or less of aqueous media over the pH range of 1 to 7.5. The volume estimate of 250 mL is derived from typical bioequivalence study protocols that prescribe administration of a drug product to fasting human volunteers with a glass of water^[9].

The intestinal permeability classification is based on a comparison to the intravenous injection. All those factors are highly important, since 85% of the most sold drugs in the USA and Europe are orally administered.

All drugs have been divided into four classes: class I—high soluble and high permeable, class II—low soluble and high permeable, class III—low soluble and high permeable and class IV—low soluble and low permeable.

2. Importance of Solubility

Oral ingestion is the most convenient and commonly employed route of drug delivery due to its ease of administration, high patient compliance, cost-effectiveness, least sterility constraints, and flexibility in the design of dosage form. As a result, many of the generic drug companies are inclined more to produce bioequivalent oral drug products^[10].

However, the major challenge with the design of oral dosage forms lies with their poor bioavailability. The oral bioavailability depends on

several factors including aqueous solubility, drug permeability, dissolution rate, first-pass metabolism, presystemic metabolism, and susceptibility to efflux mechanisms. The most frequent causes of low oral bioavailability are attributed to poor solubility and low permeability.

Solubility also plays a major role for other dosage forms like parenteral formulations as well^[11]. Solubility is one of the important parameters to achieve desired concentration of drug in systemic circulation for achieving required pharmacological response^[12]. Poorly water soluble drugs often require high doses in order to reach therapeutic plasma concentrations after oral administration. Low aqueous solubility is the major problem encountered with formulation development of new chemical entities as well as generic development. Any drug to be absorbed must be present in the form of an aqueous solution at the site of absorption. Water is the solvent of choice for liquid pharmaceutical formulations. Most of the drugs are either weakly acidic or weakly basic having poor aqueous solubility.

More than 40% NCEs (new chemical entities) developed in pharmaceutical industry are practically insoluble in water. These poorly water soluble drugs having slow drug absorption leads to inadequate and variable bioavailability and gastrointestinal mucosal toxicity. For orally administered drugs solubility is the most important one rate limiting parameter to achieve their desired concentration in systemic circulation for pharmacological response. Problem of solubility is a major challenge for formulation scientist^[13].

The improvement of drug solubility thereby its oral bio-availability remains one of the most challenging aspects of drug development process especially for oral-drug delivery system. There are numerous approaches available and reported in literature to enhance the solubility of poorly water-soluble drugs. The techniques are chosen on the basis of certain aspects such as properties of drug under consideration, nature of excipients to be selected, and nature of intended dosage form.

The poor solubility and low dissolution rate of poorly water soluble drugs in the aqueous gastrointestinal fluids often cause insufficient bioavailability. Especially for class II (low solubility and high permeability) substances according to the BCS, the bioavailability may be enhanced by increasing the solubility and dissolution rate of the drug in the gastro-intestinal fluids. As for BCS class II drugs rate limiting step is drug release from the dosage form and solubility in the gastric fluid and not the absorption, so increasing the solubility in turn

increases the bioavailability for BCS class II drugs [10, 13, 14].

The negative effect of compounds with low solubility include poor absorption and bioavailability, insufficient solubility for IV dosing, development challenges leading to increasing the development cost and time, burden shifted to patient (frequent high-dose administration) [11].

3. Techniques for Solubility Enhancement

Solubility improvement techniques can be categorized in to physical modification, chemical modifications of the drug substance, and other techniques.

Physical Modifications

Particle size reduction like micronization and nanosuspension, modification of the crystal habit like polymorphs, amorphous form and cocrystallization, drug dispersion in carriers like eutectic mixtures, solid dispersions, solid solutions and cryogenic techniques.

Chemical Modifications

Change of pH, use of buffer, derivatization, complexation, and salt formation.

Miscellaneous Methods

Supercritical fluid process, use of adjuvant like surfactant, solubilizers, cosolvency, hydrotrophy, and novel excipients.

4. Particle Size Reduction

The solubility of drug is often intrinsically related to drug particle size; as a particle becomes smaller, the surface area to volume ratio increases. The larger surface area allows greater interaction with the solvent which causes an increase in solubility.

Conventional methods of particle size reduction, such as comminution and spray drying, rely upon mechanical stress to disaggregate the active compound. Particle size reduction is thus permitting an efficient, reproducible, and economic means of solubility enhancement. However, the mechanical forces inherent to comminution, such as milling and grinding, often impart significant amounts of physical stress upon the drug product which may induce degradation. The thermal stress which may occur during comminution and spray drying is also a concern when processing thermosensitive or unstable active compounds. Using traditional approaches for nearly insoluble drugs may not be able to enhance the solubility up to desired level.

Micronization is another conventional technique for the particle size reduction. Micronization increases the dissolution rate of drugs through increased surface area, it does not increase equilibrium solubility. Decreasing the particle size of these drugs, which cause increase in surface area,

improve their rate of dissolution. Micronization of drugs is done by milling techniques using jet mill, rotor stator colloid mills and so forth micronization is not suitable for drugs having a high dose number because it does not change the saturation solubility of the drug [15].

These processes were applied to griseofulvin, progesterone, spironolactone diosmin, and fenofibrate. For each drug, micronization improved their digestive absorption, and consequently their bioavailability and clinical efficacy. Micronized fenofibrate exhibited more than 10-fold (1.3% to 20%) increase in dissolution in at 30 minutes biorelevant media [16, 17].

5. Solid Dispersion

The concept of solid dispersions was originally proposed by Sekiguchi and Obi, who investigated the generation and dissolution performance of eutectic melts of a sulfonamide drug and a water-soluble carrier in the early 1960s [18]. Solid dispersions represent a useful pharmaceutical technique for increasing the dissolution, absorption, and therapeutic efficacy of drugs in dosage forms. The term solid dispersion refers to a group of solid products consisting of at least two different components, generally a hydrophilic matrix and a hydrophobic drug. The most commonly used hydrophilic carriers for solid dispersions include polyvinylpyrrolidone (Povidone, PVP), polyethylene glycols (PEGs), Plasdone-S630. Surfactants like Tween-80, docusate sodium, Myrj-52, Pluronic-F68, and sodium lauryl sulphate (SLS) also find a place in the formulation of solid dispersion.

The solubility of celecoxib, halofantrine, and ritonavir can be improved by solid dispersion using suitable hydrophilic carriers like celecoxib with povidone (PVP) and ritonavir with gelucire. Various techniques to prepare the solid dispersion of hydrophobic drugs with an aim to improve their aqueous solubility are listed here [19-21].

5.1. Hot-Melt Method (Fusion Method)

The main advantages of this direct melting method is its simplicity and economy. The melting or fusion method was first proposed by Sekiguchi and Obi to prepare fast release solid dispersion dosage forms. In this method, the physical mixture of a drug and a water-soluble carrier are heated directly until the two melts. The melted mixture is then cooled and solidified rapidly in an ice bath with rigorous stirring. The final solid mass is then crushed, pulverized, and sieved, which can be compressed into tablets with the help of tableting agents. The melting point of a binary system is dependent upon its composition, that

is, the selection of the carrier and the weight fraction of the drug in the system^[22].

An important requisite for the formation of solid dispersion by the hot-melt method is the miscibility of the drug and the carrier in the molten form. Another important requisite is the thermostability of both the drug and the carrier.

5.2. Solvent Evaporation Method

Tachibana and Nakamura^[23] were the first to dissolve both the drug and the carrier in a common solvent and then evaporate the solvent under vacuum to produce a solid solution. This enabled them to produce a solid solution of the highly lipophilic β -carotene in the highly water soluble carrier povidone. Many investigators studied solid dispersion of meloxicam, naproxen, and nimesulide using solvent evaporation technique. These findings suggest that the above-mentioned technique can be employed successfully for improvement and stability of solid dispersions of poorly water soluble drugs^[15, 17].

The main advantage of the solvent evaporation method is that thermal decomposition of drugs or carriers can be prevented because of the low temperature required for the evaporation of organic solvents. However, the disadvantages associated with this method are the higher cost of preparation, the difficulty in completely removing the organic solvent (a regulatory perspective), the possible adverse effect of the supposedly negligible amount of the solvent on the chemical stability of the drug, the selection of a common volatile solvent, and the difficulty in reproducing crystal forms^[24].

5.3. Hot-Melt Extrusion

Hot-melt extrusion is essentially the same as the fusion method except that intense mixing of the components is induced by the extruder. Just like in the traditional fusion process, miscibility of the drug and the matrix could be a problem. High-shear forces resulting in high local temperature in the extruder is a problem for heat sensitive materials. However, compared to the traditional fusion method, this technique offers the possibility of continuous production, which makes it suitable for large-scale production. Furthermore, the product is easier to handle because at the outlet of the extruder the shape can be adapted to the next processing step without grinding^[20].

6. Nanosuspension

Nanosuspension technology has been developed as a promising candidate for efficient delivery of hydrophobic drugs. This technology is applied to poorly soluble drugs that are insoluble in

both water and oils. A pharmaceutical nanosuspension is a biphasic system consisting of nano sized drug particles stabilized by surfactants for either oral and topical use or parenteral and pulmonary administration. The particle size distribution of the solid particles in nanosuspensions is usually less than one micron with an average particle size ranging between 200 and 600 nm^[25, 26].

Various methods utilized for preparation of nanosuspensions include precipitation technique, media milling, high-pressure homogenization in water, high pressure homogenization in nonaqueous media, and combination of Precipitation and high-Pressure homogenization^[27, 28].

6.1. Precipitation Technique

In precipitation technique the drug is dissolved in a solvent, which is then added to antisolvent to precipitate the crystals. The basic advantage of precipitation technique is the use of simple and low cost equipments; but the challenge is the addition of the growing drug crystals to avoid formation of microparticles. The limitation of this precipitation technique is that the drug needs to be soluble in at least one solvent and this solvent needs to be miscible with antisolvent. Moreover, precipitation technique is not applicable to drugs, which are simultaneously poorly soluble in aqueous and nonaqueous media^[29]. Nanosuspension of Danazol and Naproxen have been prepared by precipitation technique to improve their dissolution rate and oral bioavailability. The size reduction of naproxen was also associated with an apparent increase in the rate of absorption by approximately 4-fold^[30, 31].

6.2. Media Milling

The nanosuspensions are prepared by using high-shear media mills. The milling chamber charged with milling media, water, drug, and stabilizer is rotated at a very high-shear rate under controlled temperatures for several days (at least 2–7 days). The milling medium is composed of glass, Zirconium oxide, or highly cross-linked polystyrene resin. High energy shear forces are generated as a result of the impaction of the milling media with the drug resulting into breaking of microparticulate drug to nanosized particles^[28].

6.3. High Pressure Homogenization

High-pressure homogenization has been used to prepare nanosuspension of many poorly water soluble drugs. In this method, the suspension of a drug and surfactant is forced under pressure through a nanosized aperture valve of a high pressure homogenizer. The principle of this method is based

on cavitation in the aqueous phase. The cavitations forces within the particles are sufficiently high to convert the drug microparticles into nanoparticles. The concern with this method is the need for small sample particles before loading and the fact that many cycles of homogenization are required^[32].

Dissolution rate and bioavailability of poorly soluble drugs such as spironolactone, budesonide, and omeprazole have been improved by reducing their particle size by high pressure homogenization^[33-35].

6.4. Combined Precipitation and Homogenization

The precipitated drug nanoparticles have a tendency to continue crystal growth to the size of microcrystals. They need to be processed with high-energy forces (homogenisation). They are in completely amorphous, partially amorphous or completely crystalline forms which create problems in long term stability as well as in bioavailability, so the precipitated particle suspension is subsequently homogenized which preserve the particle size obtained after the precipitation step.

7. Supercritical Fluid (SCF) Process

Another novel nanosizing and solubilisation technology whose application has increased in recent years is particle size reduction via supercritical fluid (SCF) processes. Supercritical fluids are fluids whose temperature and pressure are greater than its critical temperature (T_c) and critical pressure (T_p), allowing it to assume the properties of both a liquid and a gas. At near-critical temperatures, SCFs, are highly compressible allowing moderate changes in pressure to greatly alter the density and mass transport characteristics of the fluid that largely determine its solvent power. Once the drug particles are solubilised within the SCF (usually carbon dioxide), they may be recrystallised at greatly reduced particle sizes. The flexibility and precision offered by SCF processes allows micronisation of drug particles within narrow ranges of particle size, often to submicron levels. Current SCF processes have demonstrated the ability to create nanoparticulate suspensions of particles 5–2,000 nm in diameter. Several pharmaceutical companies, such as Nektar Therapeutics and Lavipharm, are specializing in particle engineering via SCF technologies for particle size reduction and solubility enhancement. Several methods of SCF processing have been developed to address individual aspects of these shortcomings, such as precipitation with compressed antisolvent process (PCA), solution enhanced dispersion by SCF (SEDS), supercritical antisolvent processes (SAS), rapid expansion of supercritical solutions (RESS), gas anti solvent

recrystallization (GAS), and aerosol supercritical extraction system (ASES)^[36, 37].

8. Cryogenic Techniques

Cryogenic techniques have been developed to enhance the dissolution rate of drugs by creating nanostructured amorphous drug particles with high degree of porosity at very low-temperature conditions. Cryogenic inventions can be defined by the type of injection device (capillary, rotary, pneumatic, and ultrasonic nozzle), location of nozzle (above or under the liquid level), and the composition of cryogenic liquid (hydrofluoroalkanes, N_2 , Ar, O_2 , and organic solvents). After cryogenic processing, dry powder can be obtained by various drying processes like spray freeze drying, atmospheric freeze drying, vacuum freeze drying, and lyophilisation^[38-40].

8.1. Spray Freezing onto Cryogenic Fluids

Briggs and Maxwell invented the process of spray freezing onto cryogenic fluids. In this technique, the drug and the carrier (mannitol, maltose, lactose, inositol, or dextran) were dissolved in water and atomized above the surface of a boiling agitated fluorocarbon refrigerant. Sonication probe can be placed in the stirred refrigerant to enhance the dispersion of the aqueous solution^[41].

8.2. Spray Freezing into Cryogenic Liquids (SFL)

The SFL particle engineering technology has been used to produce amorphous nanostructured aggregates of drug powder with high surface area and good wettability. It incorporates direct liquid-liquid impingement between the automatized feed solution and cryogenic liquid to provide intense atomization into microdroplets and consequently significantly faster freezing rates. The frozen particles are then lyophilized to obtain dry and free-flowing micronized powders^[42].

8.3. Spray Freezing into Vapor over Liquid (SFV/L)

Freezing of drug solutions in cryogenic fluid vapours and subsequent removal of frozen solvent produces fine drug particles with high wettability. During SFV/L the atomized droplets typically start to freeze in the vapor phase before they contact the cryogenic liquid. As the solvent freezes, the drug becomes supersaturated in the unfrozen regions of the atomized droplet, so fine drug particles may nucleate and grow^[43].

8.4. Ultra-Rapid Freezing (URF)

Ultra-rapid freezing is a novel cryogenic technology that creates nanostructured drug particles

with greatly enhanced surface area and desired surface morphology by using solid cryogenic substances. Application of drugs solution to the solid surface of cryogenic substrate leads to instantaneous freezing and subsequent lyophilization (for removal of solvent) forms micronized drug powder with improved solubility. Ultra rapid freezing hinders the phase separation and the crystallization of the pharmaceutical ingredients leading to intimately mixed, amorphous drug-carrier solid dispersions, and solid solutions^[45].

Conclusion

Dissolution of drug is the rate determining step for oral absorption of the poorly water soluble drugs and solubility is the basic requirement for the absorption of the drug from GIT. The various techniques described above alone or in combination can be used to enhance the solubility of the drugs. Proper selection of solubility enhancement method is the key to ensure the goals of a good formulation like good oral bioavailability, reduce frequency of dosing and better patient compliance combined with a low cost of production. Selection of method for solubility enhancement depends upon drug characteristics like solubility, chemical nature, melting point, absorption site, physical nature, pharmacokinetic behavior and so forth, dosage form requirement like tablet or capsule formulation, strength, immediate, or modified release and so forth, and regulatory requirements like maximum daily dose of any excipients and/or drug, approved excipients, analytical accuracy.

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